



Testimony on House Bill 5491

My name is Robin Puchala. I am a Parent and Grandparent from New Britain, CT and a graduate of the Parent Leadership Training Institute. I am here representing CT Parent Power today, an influential parent organization currently 2,600 parents strong!

As an organization we want to come out in support of H.B. No. 5491, otherwise known as the Achievement Gap Bill.

We want to emphasize the importance of parental involvement that makes a crucial difference to the academic success of Connecticut's students and schools.

In support of this statement, I would like to quote Anne T. Henderson, Senior Fellow, for the Community Involvement Program of the Annenberg Institute for School Reform in her testimony before the U.S. Senate in March of 2007,

"If the first big story can be summed up in a sentence, it is: When families are involved in home and at school, children do better in school and the schools get better. These effects are greatest for low-income students."

To further strengthen parent involvement, we encourage you to supplement the new language in Section 1 subsection (4)g of the bill with the following:

(1) To support opportunities for parents to participate fully in the development of the School Improvement Plan (required in the third year of all schools deemed to be "failing" under NCLB) empower us with the right to collaborate locally with principals and teachers in developing this plan. Currently federal law only requires that we be consulted with.

(2) We can help enhance the "Supplemental Educational Services" tutoring, which is required if the "failing" designation gets carried into the fourth year. On the tutoring vouchers, not all providers approved statewide have been able to operate quality programs in each locality. We suggest, over and above existing federal language, Connecticut require that affected parents, principals and teachers should review these private tutoring companies and make

recommendations on the ones they find effective. This will ensure that tutoring dollars are being well spent and parents are getting a say in local decisions.

CT Parent Power would welcome the opportunity to work with the Committee to draft parent friendly language in these two areas.

Let me further come out in recognition and support of the four key points Commissioner McQuillan outlined in "What Connecticut Must Do To Join Race to the Top" in Saturday's Hartford Courant article. At a minimum, Connecticut's Legislative agenda must now include these four points:

- (1) Enactment of the Connecticut Plan for Secondary School Reform,
- (2) Legislation to Remove Barriers to charter school expansion,
- (3) Increased flexibility in our statutes and certification regs to allow for highly talented teachers and principals to become certified in Connecticut, and
- (4) Enhance opportunities and incentives for highly effective teachers.

To this end, we urge you to support this bill to address the long standing achievement gap in Connecticut. CT Parent Power looks forward to working with you to improve Connecticut's educational system.

Blessings,

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